

Ursuline Academy, Priest's House
300 Augusta Street
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No. TX-32-E

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

URSULINE ACADEMY, PRIEST'S HOUSE

HABS No. TX-32-E

Location: 300 Augusta Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

Present Owner: San Antonio Conservation Society.

Present Occupants: Mr. and Mrs. John C. Garner, Jr.

Significance: This structure is one of the seven Ursuline Academy buildings surviving today and the most stylistically pretentious of them all. Designed in the Gothic Revival style, it is unusual both for the quality of the stylistic details and for the fact of its late erection in that style, circa 1882. This building is unique in the above respects and has no comparison in this state.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1882-83.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: See History section of the Ursuline Academy, HABS No. TX-32.
4. Original plans and construction: The original shape of the building is somewhat conjectural and brief due to a dearth of research data.

From an old view of the community grounds published by Morrison and Fourmey in 1887, there was on this site a one-story residential building, T-shaped, with gable roofs, and galleries across the south and west facades. This view is further substantiated by the Birds' Eye View. . . . San Antonio dated 1873 by Augustas Koch which shows a flat roofed T-shaped one-story building on the site.

The present building replaced this earlier structure sometime around 1882. This is based on the statement that the Commencement Hall, which is on second floor of the house, was used for the first time in 1883.

Possibly the earlier structure may have been the original school building and had probably already been erected prior to the Sisters' arrival in 1851.

See also History section of Ursuline Academy, HABS No. TX-32.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: In this building, regional building materials and methods and climatic conditions influenced the building design.
2. Condition of fabric: Condition is judged good. The walls, roof and floor framing are sound with no evidence of serious deterioration. Mortar joints, however, are in need of repair. External woodwork, including the east gallery, is in need of patching, painting, and general renovation.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The eastern portion is 27'-0" x 68'-0". The western portion (ell) is 24'-4" x 36'-0". The shape is "L".
2. Foundation: Soft yellowish limestone.
3. Walls: Soft yellowish limestone. East wall and north wall near chapel have fairly evenly faced rubble stonework with stone of a wide variety of sizes, some as large as 18 inches high and others as long as 4 feet 6 inches. Stone lintels span door and window openings. The other walls have stonework more closely approaching random ashlar, but many stones are not rectangular. Lintels here are approximately 20 inches high with a cavetto molding above (in some cases), and the mortar matches the color of the stone and has been fooled in such a way as to make the stone joints look more geometric than they are. Where the outer mortar has weathered away, the inner mortar appears to be no more than fine sand.
4. Structural system, framing: Wood floors at the first floor are in effect wooden platforms resting on the ground under the building, thereby encouraging termites and vermin. These floors are a system of joists on posts and small girders. The second floor framing is wood and is supported by the masonry walls. The second floor ceiling is framed in 2" x 6"s at 24" on center and the roof is framed in 2" x 4"s at the same spacing. Above two of the wide-span rooms the ends of the ceiling joists are bolted to the rafters with 3/8" diameter bolts, one at each connection, and raised a few feet higher than the top of the exterior walls.

5. Porches: The two-story porches at the south and east are framed in wood. The tongue-and-groove wooden ceiling of the first floor part of the east porch slopes down from the building, indicating that the porch was probably at one time only one story in height. The east porch has 6" square section posts, wood upper floor and flagstone lower floor.
6. Chimneys: Stone, as used in the walls, and brick.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Frames are wood and recessed from the exterior wall face, so that the exterior masonry corners of the openings are exposed; however, the interior depth of the reveals is cased in wood and the reveals are slightly splayed. Doors are of various types: some are paneled and partly glazed, others are pairs of French doors with panels only at the lower portion. Many of the doors have louvered shutters.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The frames are similar to the door frames. Both inward-opening casements and double-hung sash are used. All windows are equipped for shutters, although some of the shutter frames have been converted to insect screen frames. Lintels are over the windows.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gabled, standing-seam metal cover, no evidence of earlier wood shingles.
 - b. Parapet, cornice and eaves: The end walls are treated as corbie gables, which extend above the roof to form parapets. Each is finished by a composite skew-corbel composed of four, dressed ashlar, white limestone blocks, the lower one carved with a large cyma-reversa molding. The "corbie-steps" are of the same smooth finished white limestone. A carved coping extends from the skew-corbel to the rectangular "crow-stone" at the gable peak which is terminated at the apex by a stone cross (the southern one missing).

Along the side walls, the cyma-reversa cornice is carried out in sheet metal, above which is a metal gutter.
 - c. Dormers: There are decorative stone dormers across the west front of the main building and across the north and south facades of the west ell (the eastern dormer on the south side of the ell is of sheet metal and not stone). These have

metal clad, gabled roofs and carved gable copings ending in skew-corbels. The window openings are Tudor arches with dressed limestone voussoirs. Windows are fixed, six light, wood sash.

Between the dormers are sections of sheet-metal balustrades of Gothic trefoil arch design.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The first building erected was rectangular in plan and on the lower floor was divided by masonry cross-walls into a central room flanked by larger rooms, one to the north, one to the south. A later frame cross-wall was built in the north room thereby forming a hall flanked on the north by the remainder of the north room and on the south by the original middle room, making the flanking rooms the same size. In addition, a frame cross-wall was also erected in the center of the south room dividing it into equal parts.

The upper floor was originally one large undivided room that was used as the Commencement room, but frame partitions added later now divides it into three spaces: a narrow hall-like central space flanked on the south by a square space and on the north by an oblong space.

The west ell is the same on both floors: an oblong room across the west end, and a square room between it and the main building. Both rooms are entered from the inset south porch.

2. Stairway: Original stairway led from north door of west ell to a landing on the second floor. This was later split and reversed to form a dog-leg with landing and access from the south porch. Material is wood with plain rail and treads.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: In general, ceilings are six-inch boards. Walls are plaster on stone or boards on wood frame. Recent work includes gypsum board on walls and ceilings.
4. Doorways and doors: Wood door frames through stone walls case the openings completely. Doors are of wood, paneled, and different from one another.
5. Hardware: None of unusual interest. Iron thumb-latch hardware with a locking lever is used on many doors.
6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Heating is accomplished by means of unvented gas heaters in the various rooms. The fireplace on the first floor has been closed up, its chimney stops just below the

roof, and the roof has been constructed to close the openings. The fireplace is located in the east wall of west room in the west ell, and it is plastered in plain style and has a round arch opening with modern tile hearth.

b. Lighting: Electric--bare bulbs and fluorescent tubes.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The two legs of the 'L' run north-south and east-west. Augusta Street is on the west; the garden on the east and south; the chapel is close by at the north.

The Priest's House forms part of the convent complex, whose large site borders the north shore of the San Antonio River. The immediate area is largely commercial in use and is located just beyond the border of the central business district.

2. Landscaping: The gardens are badly run wild, but good trees and shrubbery flourish. The walks need attention. A stone wall partly encloses the garden.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director of Bexar County Architecture
Survey
December 1969
and
Wesley I. Shank
HABS Project Supervisor
Summer 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The San Antonio project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in the summer of 1968, and was made possible with funds from HABS and two sponsors, the Bexar County Historical Survey Committee and the San Antonio Conservation Society. Under the direction of James Massey, Chief of HABS, the project was carried out by Wesley I. Shank (Iowa State University), project supervisor, and by student assistant architects, Charles W. Barrow (University of Texas); Les Beilinson (University of Miami); William H. Edwards (University of Illinois); and Larry D. Hermesen (Iowa State University) at the HABS field office in the former Ursuline Academy buildings, San Antonio. John C. Garner, Jr., Director of Bexar County Architecture Survey, did the outside work on the written documentaries. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress. Dewey G. Mears of Austin, Texas took the documentary photographs of the San Antonio structures.